

women. Poor white women understood these fears. They cried rape to avoid punishment for consensual relationships with African American men. These cries supported the myth of the black beast rapist and encouraged Felton's violent method of preserving white womanhood.

Democratic politicians in North Carolina capitalized on the image of the black beast rapist during the election of 1898 in their attempt to depose the reigning Fusion government and remove African American men from politics. Party leaders told white voters that the state's Fusion government had unleashed black men upon their wives and daughters. The appointment of blacks to public offices such as postmaster, police officer, and magistrate by the Fusion government placed "virginal" white women in contact with black men who possessed considerable power over them. Democratic leaders and newspapers sexualized everyday contact between white women and black men.⁶ The party's newspapers reported "outrages" throughout the state, emphasizing white women's innocence and black men's hostility in cases ranging from sidewalk scuffles to rape. In order to prove their manhood by protecting the women and young girls in their care, white men whose well-being would have given them reason to support the Populist Party were told to vote for the Democratic ticket. As the state's largest city and an important economic center, Wilmington became a particular focus of the campaign. Regular meetings of the Democratic Party and White Government Unions provided a forum in which party leaders disseminated news from throughout the South and lectured poor whites on the threats posed by black men.⁷

The *Wilmington Messenger* reprinted Felton's speech (neglecting to print the year in which she delivered it) in order to aid this gendered and sexualized Democratic campaign. Alexander Manly responded by questioning her claims in his reform-oriented newspaper, the *Daily Record*.⁸ Manly challenged the popular notion among southern judges and legislators that interracial sex was rape. He suggested that black men attracted the attention and desires of white women. He warned that white men should "guard their women more closely... You leave your goods out of doors and then complain because they are taken away." Manly agreed with Felton that white men should provide better educations for their wives and daughters, but he also extended this privilege to poor black women, suggesting that poor women of both races displayed the same questionable virtues.⁹ Doubting the ability of education to prevent sexual encounters between proper white women and African Americans, Manly asserted that many black men "were sufficiently attractive for white girls of culture and refinement to fall in love with them."¹⁰ By questioning the veracity of white women's cries of rape, Manly simultaneously challenged a critical component of the Democrats' campaign and taunted whites' fears of the unregulated sexuality of young white women.

Manly advised Felton that, in order to preserve the color line, she "must begin at the fountainhead."¹¹ When he referred to sexual encounters between white men and black women, Manly decried one of the legacies of slavery that apologists of the peculiar institution and

⁶ Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, pg. 192; Kirshenbaum, "'Vampire,'" pg. 14.

⁷ See Wilmington Race Riot Commission Report, chapter 3, for a discussion of Democratic campaign tactics.

⁸ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pg. 105.

⁹ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pg. 105.

¹⁰ Quoted in *Wilmington Morning Star*, August 24, 1898.

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